



STATEMENT OF

ANGELA BAILEY

Chief Human Capital Officer
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

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“Solutions to Improve Federal Hiring”

BEFORE THE

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Introduction

Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Sinema, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS or the Department) efforts on hiring and retention.

I am Angela Bailey, the Department's Chief Human Capital Officer. I joined DHS in January 2016 as a career federal executive and have more than 38 years of service, 32 of those in human resources.

DHS was created just over 16 years ago by combining parts of existing agencies into one agency. Each of our Components has its own distinct homeland security mission, including their own history. Although we are a "young" agency of many organizational heritages, we are unified and steadfast in our goal – to, with honor and integrity, safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values.

Our employees are on the front lines, executing our mission each and every day, performing extremely difficult work under some of the most challenging circumstances and conditions. They interact with the American public and people from around the world to prevent terrorism; enhance security; secure and manage our borders; administer and enforce our immigration laws; safeguard travel; monitor and secure cyberspace; respond to and provide relief from disasters; protect our national leaders; and prevent drug and human trafficking.

At the same time our employees are performing these incredibly important duties, the approximately 240,000 men and women that make up the Department are also mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, neighbors, and engaged members of their community. They worry about the same things other Americans worry about including student loan debt, making it on time to pick up their children from daycare or school, and missing yet another family vacation due to work obligations. Adding to these concerns is the possibility of future government shutdowns, meaning our employees may work without pay, for some period of time, due to lapsed appropriations.

During the partial shutdown earlier this year, almost all of our employees – 86 percent of the DHS workforce – continued to work without pay, and most of those employees were our front-line law enforcement officers and agents who face danger each and every day. DHS employees put on their uniforms, drove long distances in some cases, came to work and performed their duties admirably despite concerns about pay, childcare, transportation, and other stresses.

A little-known fact and often overlooked statistic in the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results is that 94 percent of DHS employees said they are willing to put in the extra effort to get the job done, and 89 percent said the work they do is important. Given their dedication and all that DHS employees face, as I see it, my job is to help DHS achieve its mission by keying in on two very important areas – hiring and retention. Our focus in both areas is forward-leaning.

Hiring

Due to DHS's critical mission, we are fortunate to have an abundance of applicants for many of the jobs we post. In order to serve both the applicants and DHS well, we have worked to innovate and streamline our hiring practices to reduce time-to-hire and get people onboard as fast as practical. Today, our time-to-hire is down to 107 days, a reduction of 34 percent from our rate five years ago, and we continue to look for more efficient and innovative practices every day. While DHS hiring strategies include time-to-hire, hiring hubs, and hiring events, they start with DHS thinking about not only our requirements for today, but also five to ten years from now. Determining how many and what type of employees will we need is a critical first step, followed by a discussion of the kind of skills and abilities we need, as well as where will we find such talent. Based on these discussions, strategies concerning how best to "buy or build" talent, including partnering with local schools, universities, industry, the military, and our local communities, are developed. These strategies are coupled with examinations of our hiring process, finding ways to streamline the hiring process and making it less arduous for those applying for our positions, and identifying technology advancements that can integrate our hiring systems making the process more efficient. For example:

1. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) continues to make significant strides in hiring. They have leveraged new procedures, systems, and practices to speed up hiring timeframes and improve the applicant experience. CBP's proactive improvements have direct, positive impacts on hiring the right employees who are highly qualified and prepared for the difficult work. Their hard work paid off, and for the first time in years, CBP ended Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 by exceeding their hiring goals for both Agents and Officers.
2. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has also experienced success with implementing new hiring strategies. ICE recognized the need for more female law enforcement officers to carry out certain law enforcement functions. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) granted ICE a "women-only" hiring authority, followed by a July 2018 "Women in Law Enforcement Hiring Event" held in Arlington, Texas, where they had identified a high number of female veterans resided. The event yielded a significant number of highly qualified women to fill ICE's law enforcement positions; important, not just for the workforce, but also the community ICE serves.
3. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) recognized that that their entry-level positions had a high turnover rate, and that often turnover was related to employee pay not being as competitive as some local restaurants in urban high cost areas such as Los Angeles, CA. Surveys and focus groups revealed that Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) were very interested in staying within TSA and DHS, but did not believe they had a career path to do so. To address this issue, TSA is presently working with other DHS Components to develop a 'gateway' or career-pathing effort to help reduce attrition and improve the talent attracted to both TSA and other components. An important element of retaining and improving a workforce is establishing transparent career progression with predictable timing of advancement inducements. TSA established a Career Progression Program for all entry level TSOs, where advanced training and qualifications are prerequisites for advancement within a pay band and for promotions to higher bands. Initial data indicates that retention incentives being used by TSA have an immediate

impact on attrition, and TSA continues to explore alternatives to address attrition and retention.

The reason these hiring strategies are so important is that, by ensuring our positions are filled with the right leaders and technically skilled personnel, we can drive down overtime, shorten deployments, and create a better work-life balance for our employees – all of which our employees have told us through the FEVS and other focus groups that they desire. Our hiring strategies help us retain our talented workforce. However, just having positions filled is not enough to retain our employees, or more importantly, to ensure that while they are carrying out their missions they have the tools necessary to deal with all that the job and life throws their way. As a result, we have put a special emphasis on taking care of our employees and their families as the cornerstone of our retention strategy.

Retention

DHS established an Employee and Family Readiness Council, made up of representatives from all of the Components. As part of our Employee and Family Readiness initiative, the Council identified the top five challenges to address in 2019. The top challenges were derived from the FEVS, discussions with employees, and our Council's expertise. The initiatives chosen to address these challenges are based on extensive research by our workforce health and safety professionals. Our goal is to ensure employees and their families have the resources to manage their day-to-day stressors, while being fully prepared to manage emergency events or unexpected crises. The challenges and initiatives follow:

1. **General Stress** – To help employees manage the inevitable stress that comes with their challenging duties, DHS provides mindfulness resilience and stress reduction training across DHS. This training helps our employees, in particular the law enforcement community, stay in the present, let go of negative experiences, and increase resilience to adverse life events. Component representatives participate in the trainings, and many will become certified mindfulness training instructors, able to teach the practice of mindfulness to their peers. Research shows a 35 percent reduction in worker stress after taking mindfulness resilience training.
2. **Dependent Care** – Based on research conducted by OPM, by 2021, 43 percent of DHS employees will have childcare responsibilities and 32 percent will have adult care responsibilities. To ensure that DHS makes the correct resource decisions on this topic, we are undertaking a nationwide workforce needs assessment that will allow DHS to accurately identify both the current needs of the workforce with regards to dependent care, as well as the projected needs five to 10 years in the future. The Department is also exploring dependent care programs for employees who work non-traditional hours in collaboration with existing centers operated by the Federal Aviation Administration and the General Services Administration.
3. **Personal Relationships** – DHS is using a two-pronged approach to address personal relationships, to include Stronger Bonds training and counseling through Employee Assistance Programs. When participants were asked before taking the course how confident they were in their ability to care for their relationship, 32 percent said they were able to do so. After training, 99 percent were more confident in their ability to care for and communicate in their relationships, both on the job and at home.

4. **Mental Health** – DHS launched a public-facing website to provide information in a user-friendly format that is available to employees and families. The information is life-event based with a focus on encouraging help-seeking behavior to address these concerns. The overarching message is that there is no stigma in reaching out for help.
5. **Financial Concerns** – The Financial Literacy Campaign, Invest in Your Financial Health, provides helpful information and accessible financial resources, addresses common concerns, and directs employees to internal programs that can promote financial wellness.

These programs noted above are coupled with other traditional retention strategies, such as cyber retention pay, special salary rates, student loan repayments, childcare subsidies, and employee engagement, to round out the overarching DHS retention strategy.

Despite these efforts, there is always room for improvement. Additionally, a way for Congress to help us is to support our legislative proposal, the *Department of Homeland Security Enhanced Hiring Act*. DHS seeks to use this authority in an effort to streamline and simplify the agency's hiring authorities in a manner that ensures the Department is able to expeditiously hire the best-qualified candidates for mission-critical positions and sustain its record of hiring veterans. This legislative proposal would enhance the current noncompetitive hiring authorities for veterans and establish other important hiring authorities. I respectfully request that Congress expeditiously takes up and passes such legislation.

Conclusion

I cannot stress enough the commitment of DHS employees to the mission and the difficult nature of their work. Our goal within the Department, and in particular my goal, is to do everything we can to lessen the burden on our employees and retain our highly-skilled, mission-driven workforce. We will continue to identify efficiencies and retention initiatives and implement them smartly across the Department.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. The Department would not be successful without your support and the support of our brave men and women who sacrifice each day to make our country safe. I look forward to your questions.